

A REPORT OF THE FORT VANCOUVER ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS OF THE
NORTH WALL

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5-3-2005

Vancouver, Washington

1966

PREFACE

This report contains the results of three weeks of excavations along the entire north wall of the Hudson's Bay Company trading post at Fort Vancouver National Historic Site at Vancouver, Washington. The primary objectives of these excavations was to hand dig a trench for the proposed reconstruction of the north wall, to locate the gate in the north wall, and to record any other structural and artifactual information that will facilitate the restoration of the north wall.

The writer is indebted to the following local National Park Service personnel for their total cooperation during all phases of this project; Superintendent Eliot Davis, Mr. Robert E. S. Clark, Historian, and Mr. Samuel W. Brecheisen, Administrative Assistant. Special thanks go to Mr. Paul J. F. Schumacher, Regional Archeologist with the National Park Service, for his visit and his assistance to this study.

My personal thanks go to Dr. Richard D. Daugherty for granting me a four week absence from the Laboratory of Anthropology at Washington State University to undertake this project; and to my wife Joan for her very faithful assistance through all phases of this study.

Vancouver, Washington, June 6, 1966

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1. Excavation plan of the north wall from the gate to the bastion. This diagram includes excavation units and all posts, wood, and disturbances encountered.
2. Photograph of north palisade butt remains.
View facing east.
3. Photograph of north gate area.
View facing northwest.
4. Diagram of north gate.

INTRODUCTION

In preparation for the reconstruction of the north wall of Fort Vancouver, it was decided by the National Park Service that the remains of the old north wall be hand excavated by an archaeologist. Part of this wall had been excavated previously by Louis R. Caywood (1955) between the years 1947 and 1954. Areas already excavated by Mr. Caywood were re-excavated but a great deal more attention was paid to those areas excavated for the first time.

The writer arrived at the historic site May 9, 1966. It was hoped that at least 10 laborers could be employed to do this excavation. However, laborers were rather difficult to obtain and keep on the job. An average of approximately 5.5 men daily were used from May 10 through May 27. The entire job was done using 78 man days excavating a total of 422 cubic yards of earth.

THE EXCAVATIONS

Field and Laboratory Methods

To fully understand and make intelligent use of data from an archaeological project, regardless of its size and scope, the methods used and the conditions under which the work was undertaken must be completely understood by the reader.

Since the ultimate goal here was to follow the outermost north wall, preparing a trench three feet wide and four feet deep for use by the contractor in preparing a concrete footing along the exact line of the

old stockade, no screening whatsoever was done. As the men excavated the trench, however, each shovel full was inspected for artifacts. Since the crew was inexperienced, everything was saved and later sorted by the archaeologist. There was a good deal of subsequent disturbance after the occupation of the fort. Namely, a spruce mill built in July of 1918 and disbanded in January of 1919 (Caywood, 1954;3) and further use of the area by the U.S. Army.

Initially the northeast corner was excavated twenty feet to locate the corner. The northwest corner was then excavated for ten feet to locate the stockade posts. Once these opposite corners were located, a trench was laid out three feet wide for the entire distance. A vertical control was not thought to be of any use here because of the relatively short, single component nature of the occupation and a knowledge of the subsequent disturbance in the area. Horizontal control consisted of each man excavating a running ten foot unit of the wall and collecting artifacts for that unit. Each unit was numbered consecutively starting from east to west. The first exploratory unit at the northeast corner was twenty feet; all the rest were ten foot units. The first 210 feet was uncovered almost entirely by the Caywood excavations. Stockade post butts were not recorded here. However, for the rest of the north wall, which was almost entirely virgin, each post encountered was mapped prior to its removal.

Two of the old stockade post butts were removed and preserved for use by the National Park Service using a modification of Fryxell's technique for preserving archaeological stratigraphy (1964).

In the laboratory, handling of the specimens recovered consisted in cleaning and cataloging all items of significance. Specimens of lesser

significance such as small pottery fragments and bottle fragments were cataloged in groups by excavation units. All specimens are housed at the Fort Vancouver National Historic Site Visitor Center. Iron objects were cleaned and preserved at the Laboratory of Anthropology at Washington State University by the writer. Cleaning was done electrolytically and the specimens were coated with Clear-Sele Rust-Oleum.

The North Stockade Wall

The entire north wall was followed for its distance of 731 feet working from east to west and the east wall was followed for a distance of 25 feet to the north wall of the bakery. Concrete footings used for the spruce mill were encountered in squares 1, 2, 4 and 5, and at the north side of the north gate (which will be discussed later). These sections were not removed. Caywood's figure 1 approximates where these were found (1954:5).

Figure 1 is a diagram of the location of all the posts encountered during these excavations 220 feet from the northeast corner to the northwest corner. Areas of disturbance are indicated. There are other areas where there existed small gaps in the post butts. Reasons for this are not known definitely at this time. They are probably due to disturbance or perhaps were up-rooted at the time of its destruction.

In sections of the wall where the post butts were in good condition, diameter measurements were taken and averaged. Sizes of the posts ranged from five inches to ten inches in diameter with an average size of 7.2 inches. The number of posts used per hundred feet was approximately 120. These figures were also taken in sections where there was no disturbance and where the posts were in the best condition. Figure 2 is a photograph of the exposed palisade butts.

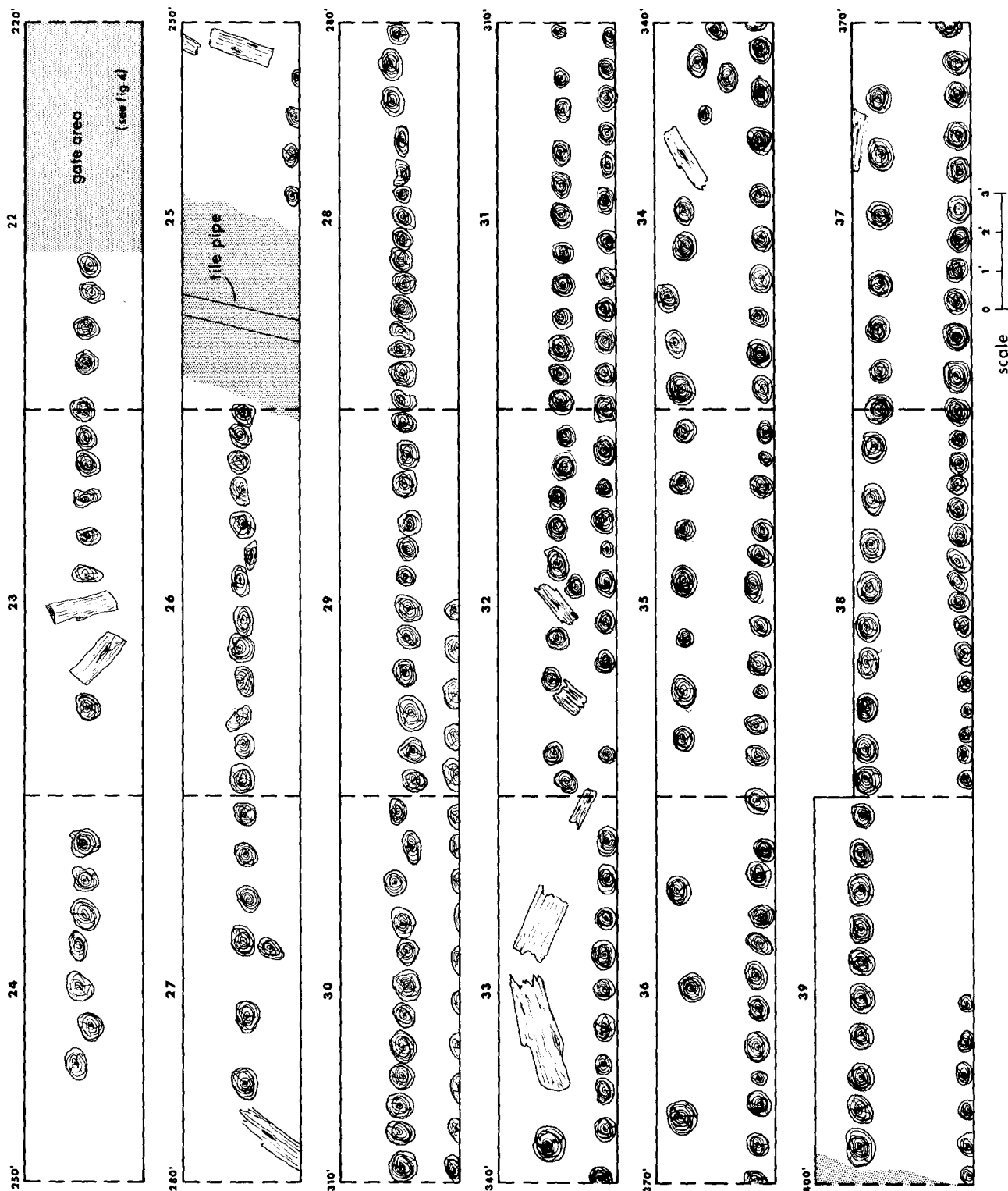


Fig. 1.--Excavation plan of the north wall from the gate to the bastion. This diagram includes excavation units and all posts, wood, and disturbances encountered.

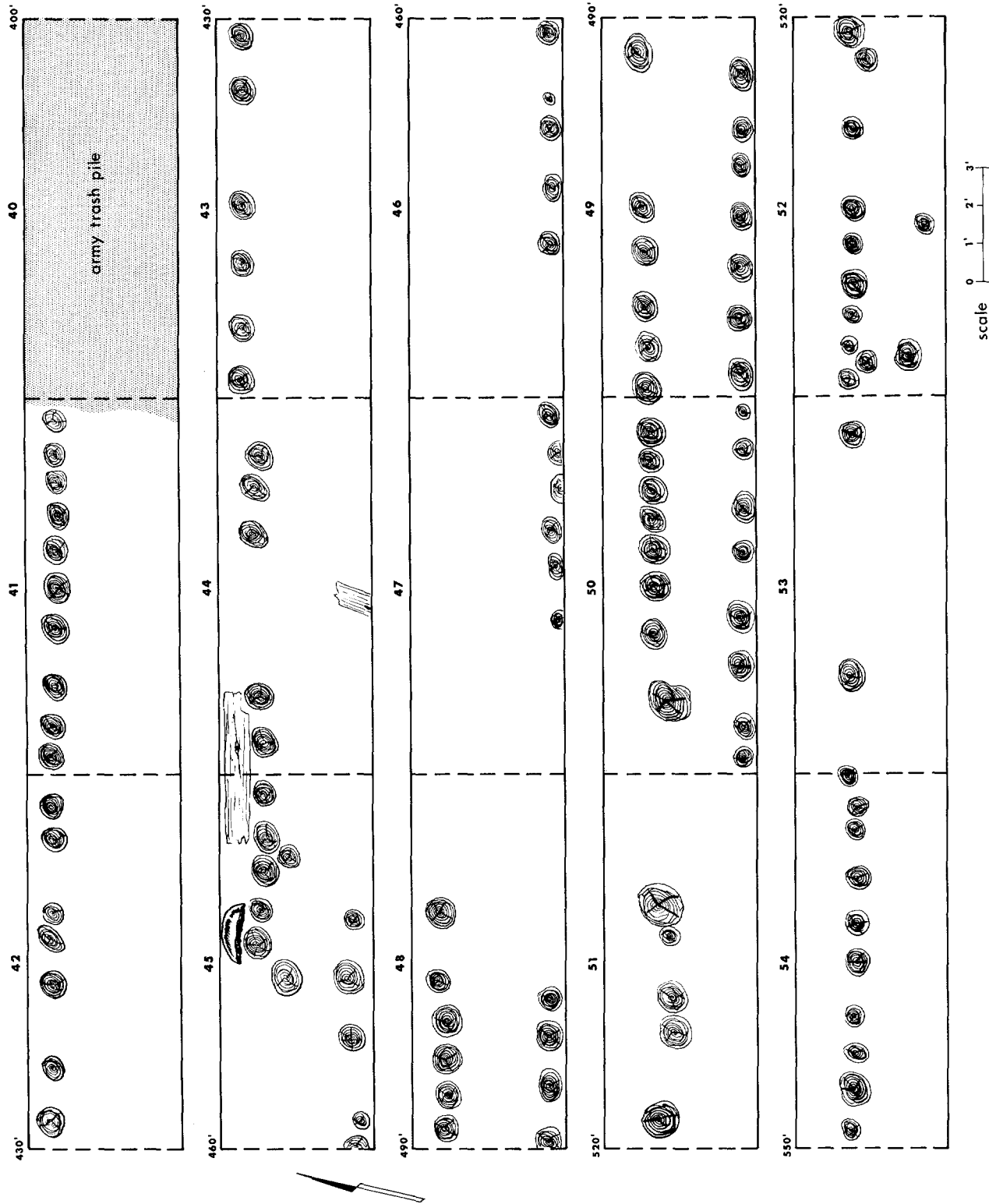


Fig. 1.--Continued

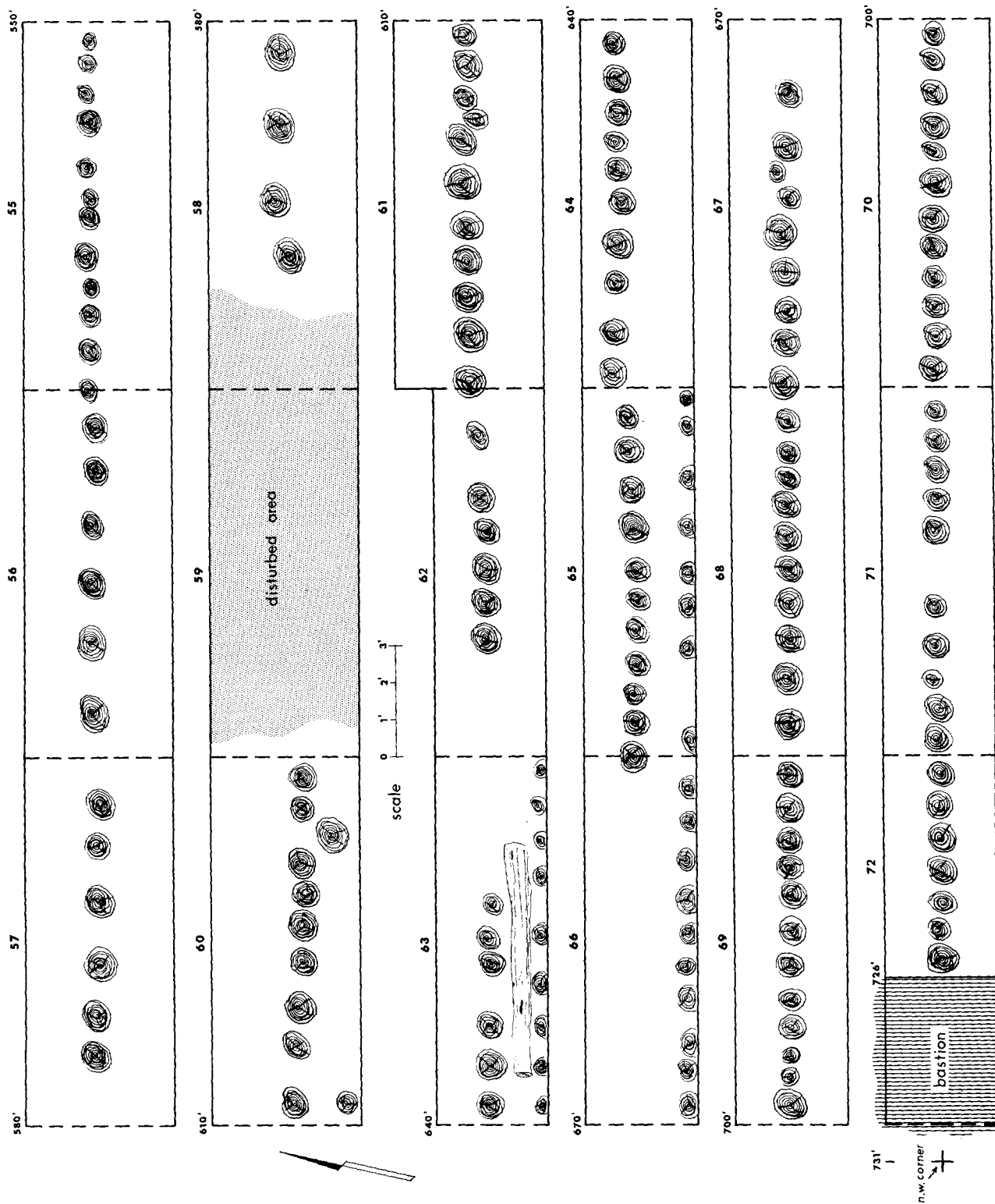


Fig. 1.--Continued



Fig. 2.--Photograph of old palisade butt remains.
View facing east.



Fig. 3.--Photograph of north gate area.
View facing northwest. (N.P.S. photo)

This means, then, that in a running ten foot section, 86.4 inches is taken up by logs and 33.6 inches is taken up in gaps or an average of 2.8 inches between each post. It is doubtful that they were originally placed in the trench that way. Perhaps our measurements are lessened due to decay of the outside surface of these posts. To the best of our knowledge these logs were not skinned. If they were not, the bark would decay rapidly and leave this sizable gap between the posts. No evidence of bark was encountered during these excavations. This would increase the size of the original logs to between eight and ten inches.

The tops of the post remains all seemed to be located from 12 to 18 inches below the present surface. The bottoms, for the most part, went to a depth of four feet below the present surface. The surface of occupation during the existence of Fort Vancouver was also around 12 to 18 inches below the present surface. The build-up over the original surface can most likely be attributed to later use of the area by the mill, the army, and leveling of the entire area for use by the airport.

The North Gate

Location of the north gate was the primary objective during these excavations. All of the available maps, sketches, pictures, etc., illustrate this gate just west of the Chief Factors residence or at a point about 210 feet west of the northeast corner of the wall. This particular spot was somewhat confusing because Caywood's excavations had ended somewhere here and the spruce mill had a footing just outside of the entrance. As the trench was excavated, small horizontal pieces of wood were uncovered and what appeared to be two large stone piles about 12 feet apart were encountered in the trench wall. These piles started at two feet and continued

down to four feet below the present surface. As the excavations moved west outside of the west rock pile, the vertical posts were again encountered.

The two rock piles looked promising and with the absence of vertical posts it was decided to expand the trench six feet to the north and six feet to the south for a distance of 15 feet to take in the entire suspected gate area. Figure 3 is a photograph of the results. The large river rounded stones did in fact turn out to be rock piles. It was planned to excavate a trench outside of the gate in an attempt to locate the road leading into the fort. The expanded trench revealed a concrete footing from the spruce mill three to four feet outside the gate. It was fortunate that this footing was not four or five feet further south obliterating the entire gate area.

A trench three feet by twenty feet was excavated twenty-two feet inside the gate in an attempt to find a road in the profile. Nothing positive turned up here other than an extremely hard pan layer for the first twenty-four inches from the surface.

The evidence looks very good for this being the actual location of the north gate. The rock piles appear to be reinforcements for the vertical posts that supported the heavy gates. There was an absence of vertical post butts through this area. There were horizontal pieces of wood. This may well be what remained of a corduroy road lining through this entrance. Apparently these gates were massive structures about six or seven inches thick and heavily studded with large nails (Hussey, 1957;133). It is noteworthy that a much higher frequency of nails, especially large nails, was recovered in the gate area. Of the ten foot excavation units previously not excavated by Caywood, an average of six nails were recovered per unit, whereas at the gate area in the ten foot excavation unit 59 nails were

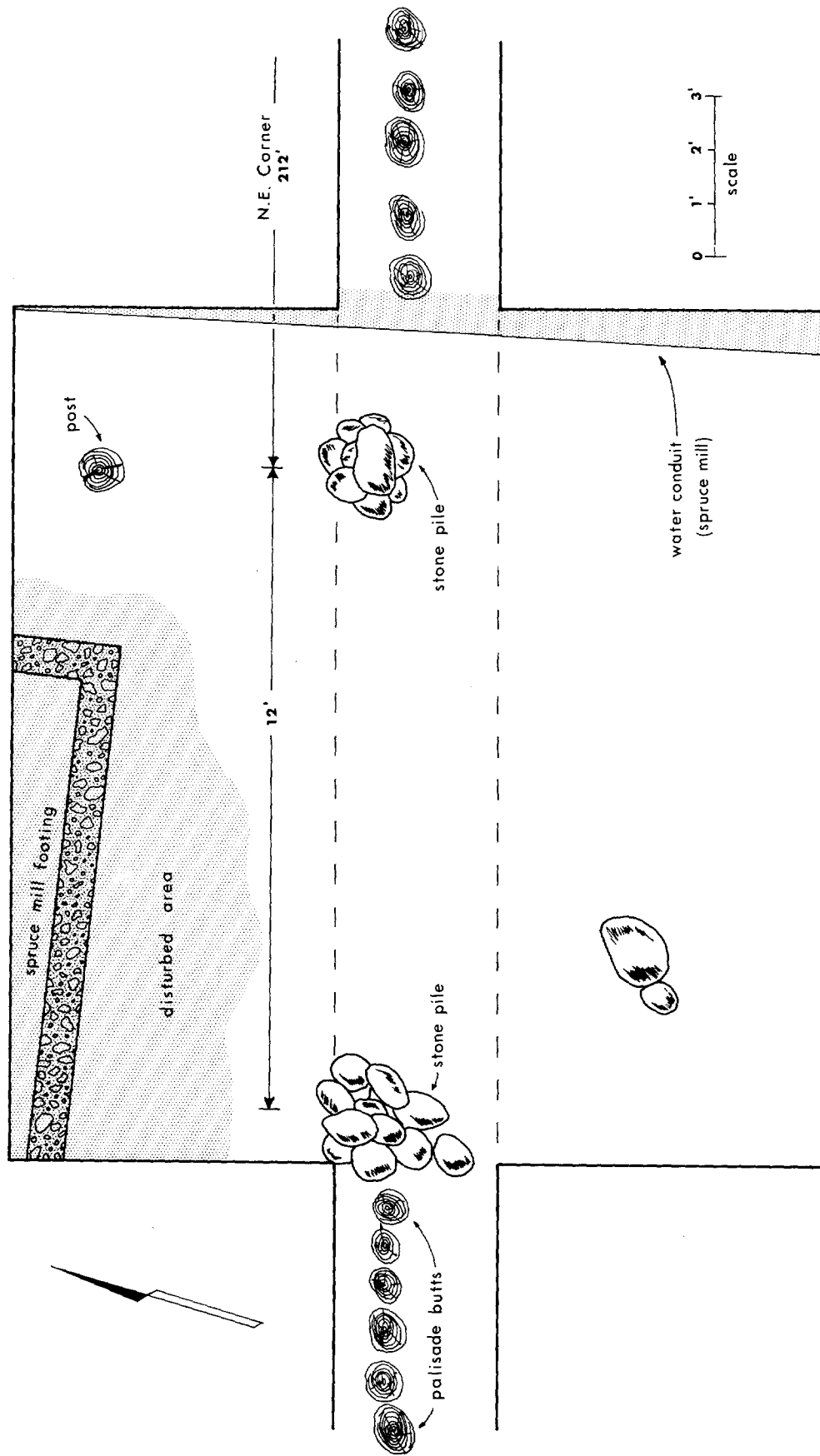


Fig. 4.--Diagram of north gate.

recovered. The six by fifteen foot trenches on either side of the gate yielded 49 nails on the south side and 56 on the north side.

Figure 4 is a diagram of the gate in the north wall. The east rock pile consists of nine river rounded cobbles and the west pile 12, measuring one foot four inches to one foot ten inches in diameter. The distance from center to center of the rock piles is twelve feet and the east pile is 212 feet from the northeast corner of the stockade. If the rocks were used to reinforce the main vertical posts supporting the gate, the dimensions of the gate opening was most likely twelve feet.

The Artifacts

During these excavations a total of 2083 items were cleaned, labeled, and cataloged. Earthenware fragments numbered 957, stoneware fragments 82, glass fragments 737, porcelain fragments 32, and 48 miscellaneous items.

Criteria used to identify the ceramics are essentially as follows: Ceramics made of a permeable paste are referred to as earthenware; those made of impermeable past^es are divided into stoneware and porcelain. Earthenware includes "ironstone" and groupings such as Wedgewood. Stoneware is represented by crocks, "little brown jugs," and a modern German style beer mug. Porcelain includes a large grouping of white ceramics which originated in China, and is easily distinguished by its translucence when held to a light. Porcelain is also sometimes called china or chinaware (Jelks, 1958;202).

The vast majority of the earthenware is Spode. Most frequent patterns include "Blue Willow," "Chatsworth," "British Flower," and "Beverly." The porcelain fragments are all of Chinese origin. The stoneware fragments seem to be, for the most part, from broken ale bottles, with the exception

of pieces to one large jug. Most of the concentrations along the wall correspond fairly well to the trash pits excavated by Caywood (1954).

The glass fragments recovered were primarily from rum bottles. Again, the concentrations correspond closely with the trash pits previously excavated. One exception was a rather large accumulation near the northeast corner of the Owyhee Church. The largest number of clay pipe fragments also occurs in this region which is just west of the north gate.

The miscellaneous items of interest include: one complete ale bottle, four iron knife blades minus handles, two hammer heads, two axe heads, a drill, three keys, one trap anchor, one trap spring, a rifle flint, a trigger guard, and one-half of a cast iron pot.

All of the artifacts from this excavation of the north wall are represented in the collection recovered previously. Appendix A is a list of all specimens recovered by excavation unit.

SUMMARY

The archaeological excavations of the north wall at Fort Vancouver have provided useful information essential to the reconstruction of this portion of the stockade. The outermost row of palisades has been excavated and mapped, making available the exact line of this wall. The number per hundred feet and the size of the palisades were recorded. This line has been staked out for the construction of a footing.

The north gate was found based on the following evidence: a break in the vertical palisade butts, two stone piles at each end of the opening which are thought to have been used for reinforcing the vertical uprights which supported the gates, and a much higher frequency of large nails known to have been used in the construction of the gate itself.

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APPENDIX A

The Artifacts Recovered By Excavation Units

UNIT	earthenware fragments	stoneware fragments	porcelain fragments	clay pipe fragments	glass fragments	nails	miscellaneous
1	2	1	5	1	10	0	
2	0	0	0	0	0	0	
3	0	0	0	0	0	0	
4	1	0	0	0	1	0	
5	0	0	0	0	0	0	
6	0	0	0	0	0	0	
7	16	0	0	0	4	0	
8	20	0	0	0	5	0	
9	19	2	1	1	6	0	
10	38	5	0	2	33	1	
11	31	2	0	0	33	0	
12	84	1	2	8	65	0	
13	101	3	1	2	59	0	bead; button
14	43	5	0	6	7	0	
15	7	0	1	0	1	1	

UNIT

	earthenware fragments	stoneware fragments	porcelain fragments	clay pipe fragments	glass fragments	nails	miscellaneous
16	5	1	0	0	0	1	
17	7	0	1	0	0	0	
18	16	0	0	0	0	1	file
19	43	0	0	2	16	2	spike
20	22	1	0	6	3	3	
21	12	2	0	0	23	59	latch hook; brass cylinder spike; trigger guard (rifle)
22	22	0	0	9	22	20	
23	56	2	0	6	56	15	trap anchor
24	66	1	0	23	66	32	iron bar; spike
25	11	0	0	4	11	4	button; knife
26	9	3	1	9	9	18	key; punch; planing tool
27	2	0	1	2	2	10	stoneware jug; spike
28	1	0	0	3	1	0	
29	21	2	2	3	21	9	bead; drill
30	16	2	1	8	16	2	
31	9	0	0	1	9	3	hammerhead; iron kettle fragment
32	6	2	1	10	6	4	knife; knife fragment

UNIT

	earthenware fragments	stoneware fragments	porcelain fragments	clay pipe fragments	glass fragments	nails	miscellaneous
33	7	0	0	1	7	8	hoe head
34	6	0	0	0	6	3	
35	0	0	0	2	0	2	unidentified iron object
36	1	0	1	4	1	4	unidentified iron object
37	8	1	2	0	8	2	axe
38	19	0	1	3	19	17	key; unidentified iron object
39	0	0	0	0	0	1	
40	0	0	0	0	0	0	
41	0	0	0	0	0	0	
42	0	0	0	0	0	1	
43	0	0	0	0	0	0	
44	1	1	1	0	2	0	
45	0	0	0	0	0	2	
46	7	0	1	5	16	0	brass cylinder; unidentified iron object
47	3	0	0	0	3	0	unidentified iron tool
48	1	0	0	0	0	0	
49	4	0	0	0	0	1	

UNIT

miscellaneous

nails

glass
fragmentsclay pipe
fragmentsporcelain
fragmentsstoneware
fragmentsearthenware
fragments

50	6	5	0	3	8	13	lock; punch
51	3	0	0	0	7	9	
52	0	0	0	0	9	2	hafted iron tool
53	2	0	1	0	1	7	lock part; 2 unidentified iron objects
54	5	0	1	6	15	7	axe fragment
55	0	0	0	0	0	1	
56	0	65	0	0	0	0	
57	1	0	0	0	1	0	steel shot
58	3	0	0	0	6	0	
59	2	0	0	3	22	0	
60	7	6	1	10	5	12	axe head; key; spike; file; unidentified iron rod
61	14	3	0	3	14	3	harrow; grape shot
62	19	6	1	4	21	10	rifle flint
63	0	1	0	0	0	3	
64	4	0	0	0	0	3	axe fragment
65	27	3	2	19	7	0	
66	2	0	0	0	1	0	trap spring

UNIT	earthenware fragments	stoneware fragments	porcelain fragments	clay pipe fragments	glass fragments	nails	miscellaneous
67	0	0	0	0	0	0	
68	0	0	0	0	0	0	
69	0	0	0	0	0	0	
70	0	0	0	0	0	0	
71	0	0	0	0	0	0	
72	0	0	0	0	0	0	